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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002765

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SUBJECT: AFGHANS DIVIDED OVER PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AS  
RESULTS ARE ANNOUNCED

Classified By: PolCouns Annie Pforzheimer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Statements by tribal elders, opinion makers, and political leaders from across Afghanistan suggest a country that is deeply divided over the legitimacy of the presidential election, the validity of the vote count, and on what a second round would mean. Local media reports in the two weeks since Election Day suggest that the Afghan people are particularly divided along regional and sectarian lines about the legitimacy of the election contest and the counting process. (End Summary)

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Free and Fair - Or Fraudulent?  
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12. (SBU) From statements by the candidates, including Abdullah Abdullah's assertion that "we will not allow big fraud to decide the outcome of the elections," to claims by Ulema council members in Logar that the election in their province was entirely free, fair and transparent, commentary on fraud varies widely. Reports from tribal elders and average civilians from the Southern provinces most strongly assert claims of fraud, while Independent Elections Committee (IEC) officials in Kandahar asserted in a press conference on August 26 that no fraud had taken place in the province. In a meeting organized by Abdullah's campaign, tribal elders and parliamentarians from Kandahar, Uruzgan and Zabul gathered in Kabul on September 1 and claimed massive fraud in their regions. The leaders called on the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) to investigate their claims seriously. Media interviews with citizens of Helmand province exposed a belief that there was massive fraud in their province. Political analysts pointed to results from regions where Abdullah Abdullah was expected to dominate but the results show President Karzai won, and Abdullah supporters from the eastern provinces have claimed there was massive fraud in their provinces. His supporters have promised to protest if their concerns are not adequately addressed. Six other candidates besides Abdullah Abdullah have publicly questioned the credibility of the election. Meanwhile, one of President Karzai's vice presidential candidates, Karim Khalili, rejected claims of fraud as "baseless accusations" and "rumors."

13. (SBU) The Afghan media, responding to a summons by the IEC to report all accusations of fraud, have run regular reports of alleged fraud. In the days after the election, TV stations ran images of children seemingly as young as ten years old voting. Media have also reported instances of men voting for several women, particularly in the south and east, and even covered reports that local IEC representatives were not independent but were working on behalf of individual candidates. Both Ariana and Tolo TV networks broadcast footage of ballot boxes being stuffed. While most of the domestic coverage has focused on alleged fraud by the Karzai campaign, there are also significant allegations of improprieties by the Abdullah campaign. Pashtun claims of disenfranchisement have also been widely covered by the Afghan media.

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Questioning the Count  
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¶4. (SBU) As the vote count approaches its second week, complaints have been issued from all sides. Candidate Mirwais Yasini has called the vote tally "fabricated" and unacceptable. A group of parliamentarians have claimed that the IEC is not independent or impartial. Some MPs have insinuated that the IEC is influenced by the West. On the other side, supporters of President Karzai have insisted that the vote count should be respected; on August 29, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesman Zaher Faqiri called on the international community to accept the results of the election and reminding the international community that the elections were, in fact, monitored by international observers. Elders from Paktia province concur and say they will accept whoever is declared the winner of the vote.

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Who Will Have Seconds?  
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¶5. (SBU) Support for a second round vote tracks with allegations of fraud. Groups of Afghans who are most dissatisfied with the fairness of the election seem most open to a second round, while supporters of President Karzai portend a dire outcome if a second round were to be held, and/or vow to boycott a second round all together. Nearly all discussion of a second round focuses on the influence of the West and rumors that the U.S. is orchestrating a second

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round are widely believed. There are many examples of misunderstanding by the public about the rules governing a second round. The nomadic Kuchi people have asserted that they would accept a second round, if it is constitutionally necessary, but "would not accept an entirely new election," if one were to be called. The same sentiment was expressed by a council of tribal elders in Helmand. A pact made by hundreds of tribal elders and Ullema council members from Paktia not to participate in second round was widely reported in the Afghan media. The elders claimed that the fraud was not significant enough to undermine the legitimacy of the elections and therefore there was no need for a second round.

¶6. (C) Comment: With a wide range of opinions on whether the elections were credible, whether a second round should take place, and about the elections institutions themselves, the possibility of a deep rift among various groups of Afghan people after the election results are certified remains a significant concern.

While the candidates are urging their supporters not to resort to violence, voters who feel disenfranchised or disenchanted with the legitimacy of their government are likely to protest in one form or another.  
EIKENBERRY